

Message Text

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, UNSC, MOPS, SY, LE, IS

SUBJECT: ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL AND SYRIAN POSITION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

1. IN THE COURSE OF HIS MEETING WITH DINITZ JUNE6,
SECRETARY OPENED BRIEF DISCUSSION OF SOUTHERN LEBANON BY
OBSERVING THAT SOME PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE SINCE ISRAEL
SET A DATE FOR ITS WITHDRAWAL. THE SECRETARY NOTED THAT
WE HAVE SEEN REPORTS THAT THE SYRIANS ARE SERIOUSLY CON-
SIDERING MOVING THEIR FORCES TO THE LITANI IN COLLABORA-
TION WITH THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT IN SUCH A WAY AS TO
ALLOW ELEMENTS OF THE LEBANESE ARMY TO MOVE INTO THE AREA
SOUTH OF THE LITANI. SECRETARY CAUTIONED THAT, AT THIS

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DATE, WE HAVE SEEN ONLY INDICATIONS OF THIS THINKING, BUT
WE HAVE SEEN ENOUGH REPORTS FROM DIFFERENT SOURCES THAT
ARE CONSISTENT TO MAKE US BELIEVE THAT THERE MAY BE SOME-
THING IN THEM. AS YET, WE HAVE NOTHING AUTHORITATIVE FROM
ANY PARTY. DINITZ SAID THEY HAD SEEN SIMILAR INDICATIONS.
HE DID NOT OFFER ANY FURTHER COMMENT.

2. SECRETARY'S INTRODUCTION OF THIS SUBJECT GIVES ISRAELIS AMPLE OPPORTUNITY TO STATE THEIR OPPOSITION TO SUCH A SYRIAN MOVE IF THEY WISH. A QUICK REVIEW OF THE RECORD DOES NOT MAKE CLEAR HOW OFTEN WE HAVE MENTIONED TO THE

ISRAELIS THAT WE THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE NECESSARY FOR SYRIAN FORCES TO MOVE INTO THE NO-MAN'S LAND ABOVE THE LITANI, BUT ISRAEL HAS REGULARLY BEEN APPRISED OF OUR EFFORTS TO INDUCE THE SYRIANS TO GET BETTER CONTROL OVER THE PALESTINIANS. SECRETARY DID NOT REPEAT, IN THIS CONVERSATION, HOWEVER, OUR VIEW RE DESIRABILITY OF GETTING SYRIANS TO THE LITANI.

3. WE NOW WANT TO WALK A FINE LINE BETWEEN (A) HAVING BROACHED SUBJECT WITH THE ISRAELIS TO GIVE THEM A CHANCE TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS AND (B) ASKING THEM FOR A DEFINITIVE STATEMENT THAT THEY DO NOT OBJECT TO A SYRIAN MOVE SOUTH TO THE LITANI. WE ARE INCLINED TO LEAVE THE SITUATION WHERE IT IS AS A RESULT OF THE SECRETARY'S CONVERSATION FOR A LITTLE LONGER, AND ALSO BECAUSE BOUTROS ASKED US TO HOLD OFF APPROACHING THE ISRAELIS, BUT IF THERE IS THE SLIGHTEST SIGN THAT THE ISRAELIS ARE GOING TO RE-ACTIVATE THEIR OPPOSITION TO SYRIAN MOVES SOUTH OF PRESENT POSITIONS, WE FEEL WE SHOULD MOVE QUICKLY TO PRE-EMPT THEM.

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4. THEREFORE, IF YOU SEE OPPOSITION TO SYRIAN MOVE TO THE LITANI BEGINNING TO CRYSTALIZE WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT OR WITHIN THE PUBLIC (IN A WAY THAT COULD FORECLOSE THE GOVERNMENT'S OPTIONS), YOU SHOULD IMMEDIATELY GET IN TOUCH WITH WEIZMAN OR OTHER APPROPRIATE ISRAELI OFFICIALS TO MAKE MAJOR POINTS ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES:

-- AS ISRAEL IS AWARE, WE HAVE BEEN TRYING TO SET THE STAGE WITH THE SYRIANS AND LEBANESE SO THAT SYRIAN FORCES WOULD ASSERT GREATER CONTROL OVER THE PALESTINIAN ARMED FORCES IN THE NO MAN'S LAND ABOVE THE LITANI AFTER THE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. THE UN ALSO HAD BEEN EXPLORING WHETHER SYRIAN FORCES COULD BE MOVED INTO THIS AREA DOWN TO THE LITANI. THE SYRIANS ARE CLEARLY RELUCTANT, AND HAVE EVEN SAID SO TO THE LEBANESE. THEY HAVE HINTED TO US, HOWEVER, THAT SOME (UNDISCLOSED) STEPS MIGHT BE CONSIDERED AFTER ISRAEL WITHDREW FULLY FROM LEBANON. THE SYRIANS INDICATED THAT THEY WANT TO BE HELPFUL TO THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT IN APPROPRIATE WAYS.

-- WE UNDERTOOK THESE EXPLORATORY STEPS BECAUSE WE CONSIDERED IT IMPORTANT THAT THE SECURITY THREAT TO ISRAEL--

AS WELL AS TO UNIFIL AND THE LEBANESE GENERALLY--COULD BE REDUCED IF THE SYRIANS COULD ASSERT AT LEAST SOME MINIMAL MILITARY CONTROL IN THE AREA ABOVE THE LITANI. WE ALSO PROCEEDED ON OUR COURSE WITH THE SYRIANS BECAUSE OF OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT MANY ISRAELI OFFICIALS WERE RECEPTIVE OR AT LEAST OPEN MINDED TO THE CONCEPT.

-- AS THE SECRETARY MENTIONED TO DINITZ, SOME STILL IN- CONCLUSIVE SIGNS ARE NOW EMERGING THAT THE SYRIANS WOULD BE WILLING TO MOVE INTO THIS AREA, OR AT LEAST INTO PARTS OF IT. THIS COULD BE A MOST CONSTRUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT.

-- WE PRESUME ISRAEL AGREES WITH OUR ASSESSMENT OF THE UTILITY OF A SYRIAN MOVE OF THIS KIND, GIVEN THE CHANGED

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CIRCUMSTANCES BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE INTRODUCTION OF UNIFIL INTO LEBANON. FOLLOWING ISRAEL'S WITHDRAWAL, WE WILL AGAIN URGE THE LEBANESE AND SYRIANS TO CONSIDER BRINGING SYRIAN FORCES INTO THIS NO MAN'S REGION AND TO INSERT PART OF THE ARMY INTO LEBANON BELOW THE LITANI. SO FAR, IT APPEARS THAT THE SYRIANS WILL BE READY ONLY TO ASSIST IN ASSURING THE SECURITY OF LEBANESE FORCES TRAVELING TO SOUTHERN LEBANON.

-- THE COMBINATION OF UNIFIL BELOW THE LITANI (POSSIBLY WITH UNIFIL OBSERVERS ABOVE THE LITANI) AND SYRIAN FORCES IN KEY AREAS ABOVE THE LITANI SHOULD BE HELPFUL IN REDUCING THE SECURITY THREAT TO ISRAEL. IT MAY ALSO BE EXTREMELY HELPFUL IN BOLSTERING THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND ITS EVENTUAL EFFORTS TO ASSERT ITS AUTHORITY. WE HOPE IN THIS WAY THAT THE STAGE WILL BE SET TO ATTAIN IN THE MONTHS AHEAD REASONABLE STABILITY IN THE AREA. VANCE

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